

Update

Winter 2015

The Space Between

By Andrew Kidde

Here at the Bellevue Mediation Program our work is first and foremost a matter of listening to stories. We have an unspoken contract with our clients -- you tell us your story, we'll try to help you. Our volunteers are paid in stories. To be a good mediator, you need a hunger for stories, because that's what sustains you, and also because your clients can tell if you're not interested.

When you pick up the phone and start listening to stories at our office, you will hear from people who are suffering because of what someone else did.

They are stories like these:

An elderly woman is mourning because a neighbor came on to her property and cut down a beautiful tree that she admired from her kitchen window. It was a tree her late husband planted 30 years ago...

A young college student is desperate, his landlord kept his deposit even after he meticulously cleaned every inch of the apartment, he was extra careful because he needed that money for his second month's rent on his new place...

A mom calls, nearly in tears, because her teenage daughter has run away. The girl had been flaunting all the house rules for the last year, she kicked her younger brother, screamed at her Mom, and stormed out of



the house a week ago...

Your heart goes out to these suffering souls, in whose stories the other parties have always behaved badly -- they have been abusive, hostile, greedy, or at minimum indifferent to the caller's suffering. You put down the phone thinking, "wow, that other person is mean..." Sometimes

you just have to sit with that thought for a while. But eventually you have to let it go because the next thing you have to do is to call that other person, and you're not going to do a good job in that call if you go in thinking, "it's time to call the meanie!"

Sometimes the other party won't talk. Sometimes they're defensive when they find out why you're calling. But mostly they tell you their stories, because they have an emotional story too. And emotions have a way of wanting to get out. So they unburden their story to you, and it's a whole new angle.

Turns out that the widow, the one with the tree, she has been raking her yard waste onto their property since they moved in 5 years ago, and she screamed at their kids for "playing too loudly" in the back yard; and finally, their survey indicated the tree was on their property anyway.

And that tenant who lost his deposit, what he did not tell you is that he melted a plastic container all over the stove, the landlord

couldn't get the melted plastic off, but the oven stank every time he turned it on so the whole thing had to be replaced.

And that teen-ager... you're on the phone with her for an hour at the end of which you're shaking your head, thinking, "they ought to make parents get licenses before they can bring the baby back from the hospital."

So you put down the phone thinking that these two people inhabit different universes – how can this be? Again, sometimes you just have sit with these feelings for a while, until you return to the idea that of course they live in the same world, in the same city, in the same neighborhood even. It's not their worlds that are different, it's their stories that have collided. So your job as a mediator is not just to listen to stories, it's also to prize apart these narrative train wrecks, to make enough room between so that you can sit between them with sufficient peace of mind to see how both stories happen in the same world. This process requires a good imagination -- not the ability to create fiction, but the ability to imagine multiple perspectives on the same situation. Only once you imagine those perspectives can you help the parties rewrite their stories into ones that easily live in the same world, ones that acknowledge the other's story. Perhaps this rewriting will bring a new harmony, perhaps just a more peaceful co-existence.

I have come to believe that one of the best trainings for mediators is to read novels... Not popular fiction, but literature -- novels where you have to keep track of several characters perspectives, where you have to imagine that common world that they inhabit, where you have to inhabit that space between. Turns out a recent sociological study supports this idea.

...(the study) found that after reading literary fiction, as opposed to popular fiction or serious nonfiction, people

performed better on tests measuring empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence — skills that come in especially handy when you are trying to read someone's body language or gauge what they might be thinking.

Experts said the results implied that people could be primed for social skills like empathy, just as watching a clip from a sad movie can make one feel more emotional.

...“Maybe popular fiction is a way of dealing more with one's own self, maybe, with one's own wants, desires, needs.” In popular fiction, said Mr. Kidd, one of the researchers, “really the author is in control, and the reader has a more passive role.”

In literary fiction, like Dostoyevsky, “there is no single, overarching authorial voice,” he said. “Each character presents a different version of reality, and they aren't necessarily reliable. You have to participate as a reader in this dialectic, which is really something you have to do in real life.”

Pam Belluck, New York Times, Oct 3rd, 2013.

... and it's something mediators have to do, in fact it's perhaps their central role.

I've heard it said that God is in space between people (perhaps that's a Quaker saying). Perhaps it's also where the devil plays. In any case mediators sit there too, witnessing and validating all the stories, and finally working to reconcile them somehow: you do live in the same world; this space between can evolve; it's not destined forever to be hostile and toxic; you are the writer; you can choose...



CONGRATULATIONS!

NEW PRACTICUM STUDENTS:

*Carol Betts
Jude Mercer*

NEW CONCILIATORS:

*Jay Shukla
Cynthia Klein
Lisa Snyder-Stone*

*John Barnett
Ajit Sukesan*

Parent—Teen Update

By Galit Arad-Trutner and Pam Orbach



Teens teens everywhere... We are so proud to see our recently trained teen mediators giving their time and expertise to facilitate engagement workshops for the Bellevue school district, support communication workshops at the Bellevue library and in Bellevue schools, and attend community resource fairs to promote our services. Many of our new trainees have had an opportunity to observe at least one mediation, and a couple have progressed to mediating alongside an adult mediator. We hope to offer these opportunities to other trainees over the coming months.

We are also grateful for our experienced teen mediators who are critically important to the program, and who have supported numerous families in their quest for harmony. It is wonderful to see them evolve and work towards graduation. The mediation in-service in January was a delightful mix of adults and teens learning compassionate communication together. It is so wonderful to observe the mediators stretching themselves and developing their skills and confidence.

Whether a family experiences friction around chores, homework, or a more serious crisis that would benefit from a short intervention of communication support, the Bellevue Parent Teen Mediation Program is here. We are an available and free service for all Bellevue families. Just give us a call:

425-452-4091

BNMP Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators

2015 Conflict Coaching with Robin Amadei

Wed., Mar. 25—Fri., Mar. 27 8:30a.m.—4:30p.m.
at Bellevue City Hall

We are bringing Robin back! Robin Amadei is a well-known mediator, attorney and trainer. Her 3-day conflict coaching course has had great feedback. Space is limited. Register by calling us at 425-452-4091, by contacting Robin directly at 303-604-1960, or by email: ramadei@aol.com.

Attendance at all sessions is required.

Fee: \$595.00 if you register by March 1.

Combined Parent-Teen & Neighborhood Program In-Services:

Win All You Can

Wed., Apr. 15, 6:30-8p.m. in room 1E-112

Join us for a fun evening exploring game theory and the consequences of collaboration and competition.

Refreshments served beginning at 6p.m.

Using Questions Strategically

Tues., May 12, 4:30-6p.m. in room 1E-112

Andrew Kidde presents a new way to think about the effective use of questions in mediation.

Refreshments served beginning at 4p.m.

RSVP by email: mediation_info@bellevuewa.gov or call 425-452-4091

Program Staff:

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Program Assistant	Natalie Daniels	-	452-2897
Foreclosure Case Manager	Ivy Roberts	-	452-4118

City of Bellevue website: <http://www.bellevuewa.gov>
(Look for the Mediation Program under "Neighborhood Information")

Volunteer Profile:

Carol Betts



Carol Betts has a family law practice in Bellevue which is devoted to alternative dispute resolution methods including Collaborative Law, cooperative settlements, and self-help (or unbundled services). After a couple years at the UW, she completed her BA at Oakland University in Michigan and earned a JD at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles. Looking for law in all the wrong places, Carol was initially licensed in Massachusetts. Disillusionment with the legal system set in and she decided to return to Washington where all the women in her family had settled. Rather than continue in law, she taught herself a bit about computers and was hired at Microsoft to support the launch of Windows 3.0. Eventually landing in testing, where the object is to break software, a moment of clarity revealed that she is better at fixing things than breaking them. Armed with the wisdom of a newly divorced parent, she took the WA bar exam during an earthquake in 2001 and hung out her shingle. In addition to volunteering with the Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program, she is a volunteer settlement master with the King County Bar Association, vice chair of the KCBA Collaborative Law Section and co-chair of Cascadia Collaborative Divorce as well as a member of King County Collaborative Law and the International Association of Collaborative Professionals. Most importantly though, she is the mother of an amazing Haverford College student named Natasha.

BELLEVUE NEIGHBORHOOD MEDIATION PROGRAM

City of Bellevue Department of Planning and Community Development
P.O. Box 90012 Bellevue, WA 98009-9012